

August 7, 2020

The Honorable Mark T. Esper
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

The Honorable John Ratcliffe
Director of National Intelligence
Washington, DC 20511

Dear Secretary Esper and Director Ratcliffe,

We write in response to concerning news reports that an alleged Russian “bounty program” in Afghanistan may have resulted in the deaths of three U.S. Marines, including a Delawarean, in April 2019. We respectfully request that you quickly provide Congress with a briefing on the matter that allows members to hear from your agencies and ask follow-up questions. Additionally, we ask that your agencies complete a full re-investigation of the circumstances surrounding the April 2019 attack as expeditiously as possible, and report your findings as appropriate to the families of our fallen service members, and to the American people.

The families of our fallen service members deserve to know the truth about the circumstances surrounding the deaths of their loved ones. More broadly, the American people need assurances that the U.S. intelligence community is providing, and our military leaders are receiving, all available intelligence assessments in order to understand fully and mitigate potential threats to Americans’ lives. Finally, our government must be equipped to respond forcefully and expeditiously to foreign adversaries who would seek to harm U.S. service members, and to name publicly and impose costs on any country found to have offered payment in exchange for U.S. service members' lives.

We are encouraged that the agencies you lead have reportedly begun investigations into the attacks. However, the Administration has yet to provide members of Congress with a comprehensive briefing regarding the bounty program first publicly reported in June, or to publicly detail any actions taken by the U.S. government in response to the alleged Russian aggression. We therefore ask that your agencies provide members of Congress a fulsome briefing on intelligence relating to the bounty program, staffed by intelligence officials, as soon as possible. We also ask that the briefing cover any ongoing threats posed by the Russian government to U.S. service members, as well as any steps the Administration has considered or taken to respond to and deter such threats.

Further, we respectfully ask that your agencies immediately begin a thorough re-investigation of the circumstances surrounding the April 2019 roadside bombing that killed SSgt. Christopher Slutman of Wilmington, Delaware, along with SSgt. Benjamin Hines of York, Pennsylvania, and Sgt. Robert Hendriks of Locust Valley, New York, all of the 25th Marine Regiment, 4th Marine Division. We ask that this investigation explore any possible connection between the alleged bounty program and other U.S. service member deaths. In addition, we ask that you review the handling of reported intelligence assessments describing threats to U.S. service members from a Russian bounty program starting in early 2019. We ask that you report your findings, in a classified setting and protecting sources and methods where necessary, to the appropriate committees of Congress for further review.

We know you will agree that the families of our fallen servicemembers deserve to know the truth regarding the alleged bounty program. What's more, our active duty service members must be assured that their government is willing and able to identify, and forcefully respond to, threats to their safety and lives posed by foreign adversaries.

We thank you for your prompt attention to this matter, and for your service to our country.

Sincerely,



Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Lisa Blunt Rochester
Member of Congress